



Senate Committee on Health Policy, 2016
Loretta V. Bush, MSHA, Chief Executive Officer, MPCA
Testimony on Barriers in Access to Dental Care

Good afternoon, Chairman Shirkey and members of the committee. My name is Loretta Bush, and I am here today as Chief Executive Officer of Michigan Primary Care Association to discuss the persistent issue of barriers in access to oral health care for Michigan's most vulnerable populations. The Michigan Primary Care Association (MPCA) is a non-profit membership association of 41 community-based, comprehensive Health Center organizations throughout Michigan. For the past 36 years, we have been a consistent voice advocating on behalf of underserved individuals for breaking down barriers in access to health care services, whether they are physical, behavioral, or oral health related.

MPCA's members represent the largest network of safety net providers in the state, providing care to more than 650,000 individuals in over 260 medically underserved communities. Our members provide care to people with or without insurance and must be located in and serve residents of federally-designated Medically-Underserved Areas and Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). In many cases, without the Health Center, vulnerable individuals in these communities have nowhere else to turn. This is especially true when it comes to dental care with seventy-seven of the eighty-three counties in Michigan – urban and rural alike – having some form of a dental HPSA.

In 2015, MPCA's members provided almost a half million encounters for dental services to nearly 200,000 Michigan residents, with the numbers growing every year. Despite this robust safety net of dental professionals, only 27% of Michigan adults over the age of 21 on Medicaid had a dental visit in 2015.¹ The data is unequivocal – Michigan faces a shortage of dentists and the demand for dental services far exceeds the supply of practitioners willing to treat these individuals.

Michigan Health Centers gladly continue to provide dental care to more and more individuals each year, but Health Centers experience near constant challenges to recruit the dentists needed to meet the oral health care demands of their communities. Here with me today is Dr. Brenda Coughlin, President and CEO of Great Lakes Bay Health Center in Saginaw, MI, and Chair-elect of the Michigan Primary Care Association, and Dr. Paul Crowley, Chief Dental Officer at Great Lakes Bay Health Center, to share with the committee their experiences with underserved populations in Michigan who consistently struggle with access to oral health care services. We thank you for this opportunity.

¹ Data obtained from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Medical Services Administration, Office of Actuarial Services.